

A Sense Of Place

An Interview with Brendan O'Connor, General Manager, Adare Manor, Ireland

EDITORS' NOTE *Having started as General Manager in 2020, Brendan O'Connor has more than 21 years' experience in the global premium hospitality industry. He joined the Adare Manor team in 2015 as Director of Food and Beverage. Prior to this, he held senior management roles with a host of prestigious hotels around the world, including Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman, Sheen Falls Hotel in Kerry, and the Waldorf Astoria in New York. O'Connor has also held senior hospitality management roles during Summer and Winter Olympic Games giving him a depth of experience with high-profile sporting occasions. In 2024, he was appointed to Forbes Travel Guide's Standards Advisory Committee (SAC) for the 2024-2025 term. This esteemed role is extended by invitation only to the most well-regarded experts in hospitality and luxury brands from around the world.*



Brendan O'Connor

PROPERTY BRIEF *The five-star Adare Manor, Ireland (adaremanor.com) is situated in the heart of Adare Village in County Limerick, Ireland. Adare Manor is steeped in history and surrounded by medieval ruins. The 840-acre riverside demesne is home to a championship golf course designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. and superb trout fishing on the River Maigue. This hallmark experience offers the best of contemporary food and an impeccable approach to hospitality that brings guests back, time and time again.*

Will you provide an overview of Adare Manor?

Adare Manor is a centuries-old estate and Manor House. It remained a private residence until the 1980s when it was eventually developed into a luxury hotel and golf resort. In 2015, Adare Manor was purchased by a local family and a major restoration and redevelopment of the property was undertaken – one of the largest of its kind at the time in Ireland. In late 2017, the resort relaunched with a fresh new look. This included a newly designed Tom Fazio golf course and a meticulously restored Manor House that complemented the new landscaped estate grounds. Today it is well recognized as one of the leading luxury resorts in Europe, and it has continued to earn itself many accolades

since relaunching, including nods from Michelin for the Oak Room restaurant, Forbes Five Star recognition for the Resort, and being selected as the host venue for the 2027 Ryder Cup.

Will you highlight the history of Adare Manor?

There is mention of a Manor House in Adare as far back as the 1200s. After that, there have been many owners throughout the centuries. However, in the late 1600s, Thady Quin became the owner of the estate, and his descendants remained

as owners until the 1980s. Thady was the great grandfather to the first Earl of Dunraven, however it was the second Earl of Dunraven who undertook the significant redesign and works to the Georgian Manor House. From 1832 through to the 1860s, the Manor House as it stands today took its form. It was not until the 1980s that the estate changed ownership for the first time in centuries.

What have been the keys to Adare Manor's success and how do you describe the Adare Manor experience?

As a luxury resort, Adare Manor enjoys a distinct advantage in being privately owned and independently managed. This autonomy empowers our team to make decisions tailored to the unique needs of our resort, avoiding the potential homogenization of guest experiences often associated with larger brand or corporate decision-making. We are also a member of Leading Hotels of the World, and this connects us with hundreds of other independent hotels from around the world that share in the philosophy of being remarkably uncommon and unique to the luxury market. The experience at Adare Manor is unique, particularly due to its location and long-standing history.

We celebrate where we are, and the sense of place is very evident to guests as they experience the resort. We are situated in the center of almost 900 acres of lush green Irish pastures and parkland. The architecture is from a time gone by, and its scale and detail are such that it sets an expectation with our guests, right at the moment of their arrival, that Adare Manor will be different. Most importantly, it is the people who make the Adare Manor experience, and the



Adare Manor, Ireland



The Grand Hall

team here are the finest ambassadors for Irish hospitality. It takes over 600 team members to look after the guests of the 103-bedroom resort. The experience leaves guests feeling like they have spent time at the home of an old friend, and that is remarked upon daily as guests depart.

How important is it for Adare Manor to continue to evolve and stay current while maintaining its tradition and heritage?

We're constantly evolving, evident in our business approach as we venture into new markets and challenge industry norms. With the digital landscape changing rapidly, we focus on where our future guests are discovering travel destinations, and we adapt our marketing strategies accordingly. Sustainability and wellness are core to Adare Manor, and despite being redeveloped less than 10 years ago, we've continually invested to expand facilities and amenities that enhance our overall guest experience. Our newest addition, the Padel Club, nestled in our natural woodland, offers guests thermal suites, a vitality pool, and padel tennis courts. Despite embracing technology to enhance our operations, we remain committed to the core of our offering: the guest experience and the heritage of our estate. While we explore advancements like AI, we understand that true luxury hospitality thrives on human interaction, as articulated by one industry CEO: "Automate the predictable, so that you can humanize the exceptional."

How is Adare Manor preparing to host the 2027 Ryder Cup and what does hosting this event mean to the property?

For some years now, we have already been preparing the resort to host the hundreds of thousands of visitors to the event. On the estate, we have been upgrading and preparing the site infrastructure to support the Ryder

Cup team and to deliver a truly exceptional Ryder Cup in 2027. What this event means to the resort has so much to it. The legacy of a Ryder Cup is something that will keep visitors returning to Adare Manor for decades to come. The positive impact to the business is already noted, as the host venue status has made our resort the choice of many individuals and organizations for hosting events. What it means to our team is also something incredibly special. Being part of the team to have delivered a global sporting event will be a great source of pride to people here.



Dunraven Stateroom

How do you define a true luxury hotel experience today?

True luxury today is personal. It used to be only measured by high-thread-count cotton, extensive lists of rare wines, and opulent dining arrangements. While these are still the fundamental components of many fine resorts, today's traveler expects us to adapt to their needs and tailor the experience to them. For example, the luxury bedding is now from natural fibers, we have wider beverage selections featuring biodynamic and low alcohol options, and our food offerings acknowledge wellness and health by design, rather than by request.

Did you know at an early age that you wanted to pursue a career in the hospitality industry?

I absolutely did. I was gifted a subscription to National Geographic at an early age – each month I got a glimpse into other cultures and regions that kept me inspired. I wanted to have a career that allowed me to explore the world and travel. Hospitality is the perfect career for that – it has allowed me to work and live around the world and has really enriched my life in more ways than one.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in working in the hotel business?

The hotel business is a vocation, and many paths lead to many different career destinations. Absolutely, one should travel and experience living and working in a different culture. It is incredible for personal growth and development. Pursue your passion and master it – you must enjoy what you do if you are to have a long, enjoyable career. It is not always about being the "manager" or "general manager." There are so many options to take within hospitality – being an exceptional mixologist, sommelier, chef, Maitre D', concierge or butler can all be very rewarding career paths and all influence and change our industry for the better. ●